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ABSTRACT

Two articles address teaching English in the Peoples Republic of China. In "Why Bother About Culture in English Language Teaching?," Hu Wenzhong attempts to determine opinions about the importance of awareness of cultural traits through a study of 36 English-speaking teachers at Chinese institutions and 64 Chinese students who had studied English. The study concludes that: (1) more information should be included in textbooks on customs, habits, and behavior patterns of native English speakers; (2) programs on cultural traits in different regions of China should be offered; (3) English teaching films should be shown in classes; (4) students should be encouraged to develop contact with native English speakers; (5) short stories and plays in English and books on intercultural communication should be added to the curriculum; and (6) lectures which compare Chinese customs and habits with western cultures should be presented. Deborah Leonard in "A Walking Footnote: Teaching American and English Literature to Chinese Students" writes that these students have not developed skills for interpreting and analyzing literature and since they learn English for pragmatic reasons, students do not usually bring a deep interest in literature to the classroom. Other problems include the scarcity of textbooks, the political bias which occurs during the selection process, and the fact that many texts include only excerpts of literary works. Despite these problems, the freshness of the vision that the students turned on even the most familiar works brought new insights to these works and made teaching them a highly rewarding experience. (JHP)

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NO. 11

Occasional Papers in Intercultural Learning

DECEMBER 1986

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Teaching Language and Literature in the Peoples Republic of China

- Why Bother About Culture in English Language Teaching?
  by: Hu Wenzhong
  Beijing Foreign Studies University
- A Walking Footnote: Teaching American and English Literature to Chinese Students
  by: Deborah Leonard
  Beijing Language Institute

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In pursuit of this goal, the core of the AFS experience has been the promotion of relationships in which families, communities, groups and maturing young persons from different cultural backgrounds share new learning situations related to the purposes of AFS. In addition, through experience and experimentation, AFS has developed and continues to encourage new models and opportunities for exchange that will be beneficial for the development of society.

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INTRODUCTION

Between February and June of this year, it was my privilege and delight to serve as a visiting professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), where I taught two graduate-level courses, one on American culture and behavior, and one on cross-cultural communication.

Before I arrived in China, and for a while thereafter, I viewed myself (with appropriate solemnity) as bearing to the Peoples Republic the good news of the field of intercultural studies as we know it in the West and, in particular, in organizations such as AFS International and professional associations such as the Society for Intercultural Education, Training, and Research. My expectations in this respect were not figments of my imagination, since I had been informed of the lack of such knowledge in China by the Chinese professor who had been responsible for my invitation to teach at BFSU.

You can imagine my surprise, then, when in April I entered the office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs of BFSU and saw on his desk several books published by The Intercultural Press! Professor Hu Wenzhong, an authority on Australian literature, was no stranger to thinking in my field; he and I found that we shared similar outlooks, and our collegial and personal relationship developed rapidly. When he showed me a paper that he had delivered the previous September in Guangzhou at the International Symposium on the Teaching of English in the Chinese Context, I asked at once whether AFS could publish it in the **Occasional Papers.** Of course, he agreed.

One of the few Westerners with whom I became well acquainted in China was Deborah Leonard, a native of the Boston area and formerly an assistant professor of English at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska. An assistant professor of literature at Beijing Language Institute when I met her, Ms. Leonard was developing a love of China that led her to accept the offer to have her contract extended beyond the year initially contemplated. The amusing and revealing anecdotes she told me about her experiences with her Chinese students prompted me to invite her to contribute an article for the **Occasional Papers.**

Publication of these two articles on the teaching of English in China helps to mark a significant fact: When the **Occasional Papers** first appeared back in June 1982, AFS International was just beginning its contacts with China. Now, little more than four years later, AFS can proudly say that, in terms of numbers of people sent and hosted, the Peoples Republic of China is about to move into **fifth** position among the 72 countries that make up AFS's worldwide family of nations.

Neal Grove, Editor

WHY BOTHER ABOUT CULTURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING?

by Hu Wenzhong
Beijing Foreign Studies University

If we accept the distinction between culture as "high civilization" and culture as a set of traits,[1] we may say that the former has nearly always been a component in the English language curriculum in China. It is believed that part of the best of a civilization finds its expression in its literature and that literary language is more varied, subtle, and expressive than other types of language, making it excellent material for study. English textbooks contain a considerable amount of literature (though often simplified and abridged) and courses in American and English literature are offered at most universities and colleges.[2] However, culture as a set of traits has been a neglected area by and large, and has drawn little attention until fairly recently. The past few years have witnessed signs of increasing interest in this second domain of culture among English language teaching professionals.[3] Recently, textbook writers have made a point of including more information on the customs and habits of Western countries. "American Society and Culture" has been offered as a course at Beijing Foreign Studies University since 1979.

To find out the views of both teachers and students on questions related to awareness of cultural traits, I sent questionnaires to 36 native English speakers who were teachers at Chinese institutions of higher education. Seven institutions in four cities were chosen.[4] Of those contacted, 28 responded. I also sent questionnaires to two groups of Chinese students at my own institution. Fifty of these students were being trained as United Nations interpreters and translators and 14 were specializing in cultural exchange. My reason for choosing these students was that they could be expected to be more culturally aware since they had studied English at college for five or six years and would be working overseas among people of different cultures.

Of the 28 teacher respondents, 26 (92%) admitted that there was a cultural gap between their Chinese students and themselves and all of them thought that awareness of cultural differences should be made a goal in teaching. Fifteen (53%) of them said that "cultural mistakes" (that is, language and behavior that is inappropriate or unacceptable to most native English speakers) made them more uncomfortable than grammatical mistakes, while eight (28%) said that grammatical mistakes made them more uncomfortable. The rest (19%) either said that they expect mistakes from students or that they have taught Chinese students for so long that their mistakes do not make them uncomfortable any more. Most of the "cultural mistakes" reported occurred in socializing (60%) and only a quarter in written work. This corroborates Sukwiwat's observation that it is the mundane level that presents the greatest difficulties in contact between cultures.[5]

(continued on page 12)

A WALKING FOOTNOTE:
TEACHING AMERICAN AND ENGLISH LITERATURE TO CHINESE STUDENTS

by Deborah Leonard
Beijing Language Institute

An American professor who recently returned home wrote back to us in China that everyone at home is brimming with questions about China -- some easy, some difficult. The most difficult of all difficult questions is the one that sounds simplest. Her friends sit her down and ask, "So, what's China like?" They ask the question fully expecting to be treated to descriptions, anecdotes, and insightful analyses. But where in the world does one begin to answer that question? And the longer one is here, the more daunting the question becomes.

There is a truism that runs, "People who visit China for a week write a book; people who stay for a month write an article; those who live here for a year or longer write nothing." I can vouch for the accuracy of this cliché. It is even becoming more difficult for me, now that I am into my second year in China, to write letters to friends who sincerely want to know about all the interesting things I'm doing. China is a marvelously different world in almost every respect, and its culture is incredibly complex and many-layered. Getting through the first few layers does give you a sense of accomplishment, but that feeling quickly gives way to the realization that the more you learn about China the more you see how little you know.

Trying to write about teaching American and English literature in China is almost as difficult as trying to tell someone what China is like. And as soon as I begin I must say that every "foreign expert" teaching in China, whether because of his location, his institution, his department, or himself, has an experience that is in some respects unique. I do not presume to make sweeping generalizations. I dare say, though, that some of my experiences are typical.

In most schools that offer literature courses to their English majors, the courses are survey courses that run for the entire school year. At my institution, the Beijing Language Institute, the third-year students take English literature and the fourth-year students take American literature. English literature is scheduled for one two-hour period a week; American literature, for two two-hour periods a week. The prospect of covering English literature "from **Beowulf** to the present" (which is the course description I was given) in thirty-six class periods is intimidating. Further, it was immediately obvious that, at the beginning of their third year, these students' language skills were not ready for Old English.

The curriculum varies from school to school, but obviously, the term "English major" does not mean quite the same thing here that it does in a North American or British university. Aside from excerpts

from British or American literature (often in "simplified English") read in courses called "Extensive Reading" or "Intensive Reading," or the personal reading some keen students have tackled, the third-year literature course is the first these English majors have encountered. Their reading of literature to this point has been chiefly as a means of language learning. This is reasonable, considering that very few graduates with English majors go on to postgraduate study or to teach. Most of these graduates will be assigned (or will secure through family connections, if they are among the more fortunate) jobs in import-export trading companies, the Bank of China, the China International Travel Service, local travel agencies, or countless other positions where being able to speak English is either an asset or a requirement.

This presents the literature teacher with two realities. First, these students generally have not developed skills for interpreting or analyzing literature. They have not been asked to form critical judgments about what they read. Their lack of experience and more passive learning style combine to require a great deal of energy from their literature teacher. The second reality is that the majority of English majors perceive the required literature courses as the crowning touch to their study of the English language. Their reasons for learning English are quite pragmatic and do not usually include a deep love for literature. Therefore one of my objectives in teaching literature in China is to expand my students' knowledge and understanding of Britain and the United States and of their peoples through the art they have produced. Happily, this suits my students thoroughly -- they are very eager to learn why and how we think, feel, and act in the West. Reading our literatures reveals to them some of our history, our traditions, our preoccupations, and our values.

Before I came to teach literature in China, one of the biggest questions in my mind was whether I would be expected to teach from an approved list of authors and works or have the liberty to select the works I would teach. I was a little surprised and very pleased to be told that I should teach the authors and works considered significant and that I thought Chinese students with an English major should know. No one ever asked to see a list of the works I would teach or to examine the materials I would use.

Only movies and videotapes used in the classroom need to be previewed by a group responsible for determining their acceptability. I believe this policy is fairly standard throughout China. The form used at my institution to request a room and equipment to show movies or videotapes has a place for the signature of one of the Chinese faculty, vouching that he or she has viewed the material and that it is suitable. In my experience, this has always been regarded as merely a formality -- no one has ever actually previewed what I have shown. (There is no such policy regarding slides.)

When it came time to cover Romanticism and Transcendentalism in my American Literature course, my doubt resurfaced about the acceptability of requiring my students to read, discuss, and write about ideas so out of harmony with what I understood of Marxism and Communism. I certainly

had no fear of being punished or sent home for spreading undesirable ideas. I sensed no atmosphere of watchfulness or dark suspicion. My reluctance stemmed from quite the opposite impressions. I had been treated with such gentle courtesy, such genuine good will by everyone at my Institute, that I had no wish to appear insensible to this or to seem not to be living up to the faith they had shown in me.

One of the key tenets of Romanticism is an uncompromising belief in the supremacy of the individual over the group. Transcendentalism, usually regarded as the only purely American literary movement, grew out of Romanticism and took certain Romantic ideas even further -- the sovereignty of the individual and of the individual's conscience, the necessity of non-conformity, the distrust of institutions (especially religious and political), and the inalienable right of free will, to name a few. I thought about Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" in which he minces no words in asserting his belief in these ideas. I thought about Henry David Thoreau's powerful essay "Resistance to Civil Government" (better known today as "Civil Disobedience"), which inspired no lesser men than Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., in their non-violent resistance to civil authorities that violated human rights. And I wondered if in presenting these ideas I might seem like another naive American, stumbling into a very much older world, confidently pointing out The Better Way, and in so doing, causing embarrassment or trouble for my hosts.

I checked again with my department's leaders and was again assured that it was quite all right to deal with these ideas and beliefs. The policy in China is to allow the free discussion of ideas and these works are far too important and influential a part of American literary and social history to omit them. There have been many times in China's long history when the words individualism, privacy, and humanism have been regarded with suspicion and disapproval. Indeed, in certain contexts these words have represented very dangerous ideas. I could not help but wonder how these words, which had always had only the positive meanings and connotations for me, would be received. I knew by then that my students would listen respectfully to what I had to say, but what would they **think**?

China seemed to me to be an extremely group-oriented society. In the U.S., I was accustomed to being identified as an individual, with my driver's license and birth certificate being my most common forms of identification. In China, the most important identification a person carries, literally and figuratively, is his "work unit" ID card. The "work unit" ID cards are carried at all times and presented on various occasions to gatekeepers, guards, policemen, and others. This is just one of the most important groups by which individuals are defined; there are many others. Always, "the people," the society as a whole, is more important than the individual. The heroes of the New China are those who unquestioningly sacrifice themselves for others, not individuals who are daring enough or enterprising enough to go against the current to pave their own way. In China, young people are expected (or assigned) to study the subject that China needs them to study, and they will be assigned to work after graduation where China needs them to work.

Against such a background, how would such statements as these from Emerson's "Self-Reliance" appear?

> Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company in which the members agree for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion.

Or "What I must do, is all that concerns me, not what the people think." Would Emerson's belief that "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist" be dismissed as bourgeois heresy? And, in a country with a government organization as immense and powerful as the Central Committee, what of this idea from Thoreau: "That government is best which governs not at all"?

I could see that my students were extremely interested in my comments and explanations regarding these writers and their works. Through them, they gained some insight into the rationale for, and origins of, the insistence on individualism and freedom that many Chinese perceive as leading characteristics of Americans. Although they seemed somewhat hesitant to speak up in front of their classmates (there were 57 in this class), the students expressed their admiration and longing for, and their misgivings about, the ideas expressed in these works.

In an essay exam, I asked for comments on what they felt were the best and worst aspects of the Romantic movement. Not surprisingly, the preeminence of the individual was the idea most often singled out for discussion. Neither is it too surprising that it figured as both the best and the worst of Romanticism. The overwhelming majority commented favorably on the idea that the individual is more important than the group. Those who objected to this philosophy of the individual had reasonable and well thought-out concerns. They pointed out that an individual's belief that he is more important than the group or the society as a whole can easily result in selfishness and egotism. They worried that in a society where everyone was out for himself and his own best interests, no one would look out for those who did not succeed. And wouldn't people become very heartless in the competitiveness of such a society, stepping on others in their climb to the top or in exercising their personal freedoms? They quickly saw ahead to the knotty problem of finding the place where one person's liberties end and another's begin -- a question with which people and governments in the West still grapple. I was gratified that those who disagreed with Emerson, Thoreau, and the other Romantics did so on the basis of thought. Even though their understanding may have been incomplete, there were no facile dismissals.

As I mentioned above, most of my students saw merit in the concepts of individuality, nonconformity, and personal liberty. Some wrote movingly of their desire to see China come into the twentieth century

and their conviction that it will only happen if individual enterprise and creativity are encouraged. One student criticized the attitude expressed in an old Chinese proverb that says that the bird who flies ahead of the flock is the first one to be shot. This adage pre-dates communism in China and suggests how far back the "group mentality" reaches in this society.

A number of students expressed their belief that the U.S., although terribly young by China's standard, is a vigorous, prosperous world leader today because from the first its people have been encouraged to explore, invent, and argue. They saw the U.S. as a place where people who have ideas, who dare to be unconventional, and who are willing to work hard enough to realize their ideas, are rewarded. Some praised the economic reforms currently being implemented in China that make it possible for lazy or bad workers to be fired and that allow monetary or other incentives for good workers.

I especially looked forward to teaching Emily Dickinson in China. I tried to look past my own love of her poetry and to be objective enough to imagine how she would strike these students. Based on my very limited knowledge of Chinese literature, poetry in particular, I suspected that there would be much in her style and approach that would appeal to Chinese readers. Of course, her intricately wrought verses are not easy for even native speakers of English to comprehend. Her fractured grammar, unconventional punctuation, and gift for surprising diction meant that I had to do much explaining. But once we got past that, her brevity, her subtlety, the power apparent in her restrained emotion, and perhaps most of all, her indirection seemed to capture them.

Her lines "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant --/ Success in Circuit lies" nicely describe for me the long-standing (and by no means extinct) style of nearly all serious writing in China. Whether poetry, scholarship, or ministers' advice to an emperor or other leader, it is what is left unsaid that is most important. The real "point" is hidden, but is unmistakable if your ear is trained. In Chinese calligraphy and painting it is the empty spaces that give the brush strokes their significance. I had to spend more time in my Chinese classroom explaining words and allusions than I do at home in the U.S., but I had to say next to nothing to explain or justify Dickinson's indirection or the need to hear what is not explicitly said.

(Perhaps I should mention here that the tendency toward what we English teachers disparagingly call circumlocution, but which in China has been regarded as the mark of tact, good breeding, and education, occasionally presents a problem in student writing. It can be difficult to get some students to compose essays that have a clearly stated thesis at the beginning, followed by logically presented evidence or arguments.)

Without any doubt the biggest hindrance to effective literature teaching in China is the paucity of literature texts. Teaching English as a foreign language is better established here and there is a fair assortment of grammar books and language teaching materials available. There are a few anthologies of selected readings in English and American

literature published in China that have brief introductory comments on periods and authors as well as some footnotes in Chinese, but I found these books far from satisfactory due to the nature of the selections and the fact that the selections are (except for some poetry) only excerpts.

In the cases I saw, the selections obviously were made with a strong political bias, and the introductory comments have a similar strong political message. For example, one book's description of the Romantic period is as follows:

> The bourgeoisie had become the ruling class. The old aristocracy was pushed quite to the background. Rapid capitalist development had ruined the peasants who had then become hired workers in the countryside. A new class, the proletariat, had sprung into existence. All the working people lived in dire poverty, mercilessly exploited by the bourgeoisie.[1]

The problem is not only the hyperbole of what is said, but also that other (and in this context more relevant) aspects of Romanticism such as imagination, wildness, individuality, intuition, and feeling are given very short shrift by comparison. Most of the books available were compiled just after the end of the "Cultural Revolution," which goes far to explain their tone. Everyone hopes and expects that the newer texts being prepared today and just appearing will be less heavy-handed.

The other shortcoming of these texts is that they contain only excerpts. A literary excerpt or a simplified version of a work may be a useful means of increasing a language student's comprehension or vocabulary, but it is not, in my view, a satisfactory way to teach literature. In most institutes teachers are able to supplement these texts by having short stories typed on stencils and then printed. This process does not solve the problem of teaching novels, though, and it can take a very long time from the teacher's request to the finished product. Photocopying is usually out of the question in most places -- it is simply too expensive.

In the past few months here in Beijing some foreign paperbacks have been for sale in the Foreign Language Bookstore. Bantam has offered a selection of classics of British and American literature at less than half of the dollar price converted to Renminbi, the national currency. These books are still not cheap by the standards of the Chinese people, students in particular, but they sell quickly. This September an International Book Fair was held in Beijing, the first of its kind in China. Imported books are extremely expensive for Chinese budgets, and they must be purchased with Foreign Exchange Certificates rather than Renminbi. So, unfortunately, though the books on display from publishers the world over attracted thousands, and were handled and examined longingly by students, teachers, and other intellectuals, comparatively few will end up on school, library, or personal bookshelves.

There is definitely a lighter side to teaching literature in China. Besides the laughter that erupts (on the rare occasions) when I use my feeble Chinese in class, my students and I have found it impossible to keep straight faces when confronted with instances of "Chinglish." These humorous mistakes made in using the English language can sometimes be useful in the literature classroom. I think two examples are worth repeating.

The first example illustrates how things can go slightly awry when book titles are translated into Chinese and then back into English. On the first day of class I generally have asked my literature students to write down the titles of the British or American literature they have read in the past, just to give me some idea of their background and to help me to avoid repeating what they have already studied. Their lists of works have included such unforgettable titles as: Gong With the Wind (Gone with the Wind), Carried Sister (Sister Carrie), Shackles of Human Being (Of Human Bondage), White Teeth (White Fang), Uncle Tom's Room (Uncle Tom's Cabin), and, to my mind the best of all, The Anger of Grapes (The Grapes of Wrath). Apart from giving me the information I wanted and giving us all a little good-natured laughter, these titles provided me with a clue to something that in my ignorance had not occurred to me. My students had read these works, but not in English. They had read them in Chinese translations.

The second example is useful in demonstrating how easy it is to completely confuse the meaning of an English sentence by misspelling a single word, thereby making it into an entirely different word. The son of a friend of mine was teaching English to a group of Chinese physicians who were preparing to go abroad. He assigned them to write an essay entitled "Why I Want to Be a Doctor." One very earnest surgeon wrote, "I want to be a surgeon because I want to sever the people!" After a lifetime of seeing Chairman Mao's famous exhortation "Serve the People!" emblazoned in big characters on walls, billboards, and plaques, and hearing it proclaimed by countless leaders since the Chairman's 1944 speech, it's hardly surprising that serious and dedicated young professionals should take it as their ambition. But what happens to this lofty sentiment when translated by a surgeon learning English who transposes three letters in the verb is priceless.

During my first week in China, one of my department's leaders told me that my primary value here would be as a sort of cultural resource. Students can read foreign literature under Chinese teachers or on their own, but there is just no way they can get a feel for, or a very clear picture of, the social background against which to set that literature. I find myself answering questions I never thought about before, some of which I could not have possibly anticipated being asked by Chinese students. There are questions a foreign teacher has to answer which students at home would never think to ask -- or need to.

The freshness of the vision my students turn on the most familiar works has been one of my chief pleasures and one of their most wonderful gifts to me. It has been good for me and for my understanding of literature that I thought I already understood pretty thoroughly to be

forced to look closely at details or words whose meanings seemed obvious before. For example, of all the Dickinson poems we read and talked about, the one that elicited the most eagerly thoughtful written responses is one that my students in the U.S. usually read as one of her more simple, playful verses:

> I'm Nobody! Who are you?
> Are you -- Nobody -- Too?
> Then there's a pair of us!
> Don't tell! they'd advertise -- you know!
>
> How dreary -- to be -- Somebody!
> How public -- like a Frog --
> To tell one's name -- the livelong June --
> To an admiring Bog!

Previous students have of course felt the barb in this mischievous comment on fame, but this poem had a special fascination for several of my most perceptive Chinese students. Perhaps being just one person in a populace of one billion gives a young intellectual Chinese an insight into anonymity which cannot be available to me. One young man wrote: "Her beauty in poetry was cool, solemn, and pessimistic" and went on to comment on "her masterful use of images to give readers access to her ideas in an unusual way." He wrote that "the tedious clamor for fame and success was metaphorically described as a 'frog' crying to 'an admiring bog'." His delight led him to attempt a Chinese translation -- no small matter. I will never read this poem without remembering this young man and how it struck such a responsive chord in him. And his response has forever added other echoes of meaning for me to the simple line "I'm Nobody! Who are you?"

Another instance of my being stopped short and having to focus on a familiar detail that will never look the same again occurred when I was discussing the Willa Cather short story "Neighbor Rosicky" with a group of Chinese journalists. This is one of the most widely read of Cather's short stories, and it is one of the first of her stories that I ever read. Over time, this story has become as familiar and homey to me as Rosicky himself is in Cather's description. I was sure these Chinese readers would be as moved and warmed by Rosicky's humanity and love as American readers are, and they were. But what I had not expected was the atten- tion they paid to the story's title. I think we spent more time talking about the implications and shades of meaning of the word "neighbor" than about all other aspects of the story combined. "In what sense does Cather mean Rosicky is a 'neighbor'?" "What exactly do you mean by 'good neighbor'?" "How can this very rural, remote setting be called a 'neighborhood'?" They showed me how much meaning inheres in this most common of words.

There are many days when I feel like a walking footnote. Never more so than when we are discussing a Nathaniel Hawthorne short story, "Young Goodman Brown" for example, and I am trying to explain concepts such as sin, guilt, and salvation. Ideas that it seems we sometimes must take in with our mother's milk are not, after all, universally

comprehended. It isn't easy to define sin when none of the examples or quotations that come to mind are familiar and when all of your references are hopelessly out of context.

In explaining the implications of a character's being named Job, I one day found myself briefly telling the story of the Biblical Job. The questions raised by one student were excellent, based on a different set of assumptions from those to which I am accustomed. "How could the Christian God lower himself to talk with the Devil? How could God allow such bad things to happen to Job? When Chinese people talk about God and bad things happening, we say it's because God wasn't looking, and when he notices he will correct these things." This led me into an explanation of the Christian concept of a God who is omniscient, but who may allow a bad thing to happen perhaps as a test (as in the story of Job), perhaps as an example, or perhaps as an inevitable outcome of giving humanity the right to choose evil or good -- of allowing free will. These are issues which philosophers and theologians wrestle with, write articles and thick books about; they gather at international conferences to debate with each other over these very difficult questions. I felt like a very inadequate and incomplete footnote. But then, does anyone have a complete answer to these questions?

For all of my anecdotes, definitions, and explanations, in spite of my movies, tapes, and slides, I am certain that in this "cultural exchange" I have received far more than I have given. I have been given the priceless gift of insight into a culture dauntingly older than and different from my own. With the most generous patience my students, my colleagues -- my friends -- have defined, explained, and shown me the Middle Kingdom. Without knowing it, they have shown me my own culture as well. Whether by contrast or as a result of having to re-examine the most basic aspects of Western culture, I am now aware of subtleties that had escaped me before. Literature that I have loved for years is forever changed for me -- the familiar words now possess new resonances. And what all of this means is that in a profound way, I am changed. After my sojourn in China, I will never be quite the same person I was.

N O T E

[1] Liu Bingshan, compiler. **A Short History of English Literature.** (Foreign Language Education Press of Shanghai, 1979).

The Editor Recommends . . .

Barlow, Tani E., and Lowe, Donald M. **Chinese Reflections: Americans Teaching in the People's Republic.** 1985. The authors of this engaging account are well prepared, perceptive, and thoughtful. Includes more valuable information than many better known works. Greenwood Press, P.O. Box 5007, Westport, Connecticut 06881-9990.

(continued from page 2)

Of the student respondents, 62 (97%) admitted that there was a cultural gap between native English speakers and themselves. Sixty-one (95%) held that cultural awareness should be made one of the goals in teaching. In answer to the question "What helps you most in terms of cultural awareness?" personal contact came first (53%), followed by films, videotapes, and lectures on society and culture. The students' examples of "cultural mistakes" in some cases overlapped with those of the teachers though they were generally less detailed.

The "cultural mistakes" cited by my respondents fall into four categories:

1) **Sociolinguistically inappropriate:** The usual errors in this category have to do with ways of greeting and addressing people. One student reported: "Some students call the family name of foreigners directly without any titles before them just as they call the name of their Chinese friends." One British teacher remarked, "On a social level, I find, perhaps curiously, that the most infuriating error is the persistent use of my surname as a means of address. While there are many possible forms, from the formal to the highly familiar, in spoken English the use of the surname alone is **never** correct when addressing a woman." A Canadian teacher said, "Many students are unable to greet a foreigner or bid farewell in a casual manner." An English teacher said that he often found his students unable to disengage themselves when it came time for them to leave. Finally, the use of "Where are you going?" or "Are you going to . . .?" as a form of greeting (a direct translation of proper Chinese greetings) is so common a mistake among beginning students of English that it does not require any comment here.

2) **Culturally unacceptable:** Mistakes in this category range from giving unnecessary advice to using self-deprecation to express modesty. A British lecturer had this to say about the giving of advice: "A second irritation, which is often felt by foreigners, is the excessive giving of 'advice' -- we are forever being told, often peremptorily, what to do, and when and how to do it. Although this may be perfectly correct practice in a Chinese setting, we feel annoyed and often insulted by what appears to be scant regard for our own powers of intelligence." Another British teacher queried: "When complimented, why a fierce denial?" A Canadian teacher observed the same phenomenon: "When many Chinese students are complimented by a foreigner, they respond with humility and modesty and try to deny the compliment because that is how they would respond according to their cultural values." A student noticed this, too: "When we Chinese respond to a compliment, we usually say, 'No, not at all good.' But in Western custom we should say, 'Thank you very much.'" One British teacher did not understand why her Chinese hosts need to apologize for the crowded state of their dwellings every time they invite her. She said, "Another (and again widespread) annoyance is the unnecessary 'humility' about the state of the dwellings to which one is invited. One fully sympathizes with the speakers and knows that the speech is usually made with honest concern,

but surely it is time that they were informed that Westerners are not all filthy rich capitalists, that we are highly adaptable, pleased at the generosity of the invitation, and not primarily concerned about the setting." What my informant may not have realized is that even if conditions are reasonably good, a Chinese host is still expected to say something to disparage them out of courtesy.

3) **Conflict of different value systems:** Several native English speakers complained about the invasion of their privacy by their Chinese students (and sometimes by Chinese teachers). The concept of "privacy" is one that is difficult for Chinese students to grasp because what is regarded as "privacy" in the West is often not thought to be such in China. The students are innocently unaware that looking through an English teacher's photo album without permission or reading his comments on other students' written work is a violation of privacy. Questions about a person's age, salary, or the price he paid for an item are perfectly acceptable in Chinese culture, but they are not acceptable in Western culture. Several Chinese student respondents have noticed this cultural difference. One said, "We Chinese like to inquire into the privacy of other people to show friendship and intimacy." Apart from privacy there were other areas that showed a difference in value systems. One student said, "American professors are very informal in class. Sometimes they sit on the table or put their feet on chairs. Chinese teachers don't do this. They are generally formal in class." Another student observed: "Chinese young people are more dependent on their parents while people in the West are more independent and individualistic."

4) **Over-simplification or over-generalization:** This category of "cultural mistake" reflects the students' understanding of the West in general and Western culture in particular. One Canadian teacher said, "I think they have a lot of stereotyped misconceptions about other societies -- for example, believing that Americans don't care very much for their children." An American teacher listed the following as examples of misconceptions about Americans: "All Americans like 'disco' music; all Americans are rich; all Americans prefer eating at McDonalds." An Australian who taught literature took this view: "The problems as I see them are differences in attitude and approach rather than a set of items which can be listed. If I have to focus on one issue, it is perhaps on the tendency of students to oversimplify; to equate the figurative with the literal."

An analysis of the students' "cultural mistakes" shows that some are obvious errors that can be corrected fairly easily while others (concerning values, beliefs, and concepts) can only be corrected with a great deal of effort over a period of time. In either case, the respondents have confirmed my belief that "cultural mistakes" are often worse than linguistic ones and tend to create ill-feeling between native speakers and Chinese speakers of English. As Wolfson notes: "In interacting with foreigners, native speakers tend to be rather tolerant of errors in pronunciation or syntax. In contrast, violations of rules of speaking are often interpreted as bad manners since the native speaker is unlikely to be aware of sociolinguistic relativity."[6]

According to Hanvey, there are four levels of cross-cultural awareness.[7] Level 1 is awareness of superficial cultural traits often interpreted as exotic or bizarre. Level 2 is awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with one's own and are interpreted as unbelievable and irrational. Level 3 is similar to Level 2, but the cultural traits are recognized as believable through intellectual analysis. Level 4 is awareness of how another culture feels from the standpoint of the insider. This is termed empathy by some and "transspection" by others. The choice of the term itself betrays a difference in standpoint.

For discussion purposes, we may distinguish the recognition of cultural traits (Levels 1, 2, and 3) from empathy or transspection (Level 4). To help language students come close to achieving the highest level of recognition of cultural traits (Level 3), the following steps can be recommended:

1) Include more information in English textbooks on customs, habits, and behavior patterns of native English speakers. Beginning textbooks may provide cultural notes on greeting, addressing people, hand-shaking, leave-taking, etc. As students progress in their language study, anthropological and sociological texts can be introduced. So far, such texts are rarely, if ever, used.

2) Organize discussions on the cultural traits of different regions and nationalities in China so that students can increase their general cultural awareness. There is no homogeneous national culture in the world and China is no exception. The fifty-odd ethnic groups in China have as many cultural patterns. Even within the dominant Han group, cultural traits vary from region to region. In Guangdong province, for instance, it is courteous for the guest to tap the table lightly with his forefinger and middle finger when the host is filling his wine glass. But in the north of China, this would be interpreted as a sign of impatience. Since our students come from different parts of China, they can tell each other about those things that they think are culturally peculiar to their region. Such exchange and discussion enables students to understand that cultural differences are a natural phenomenon and helps foster greater sensitivity to cultural details.

3) Use English teaching videotapes or films in class and follow these up with discussions. The systematic observation and recording of features of everyday situations (for example, store clerks and customers, telephone conversations, casual meetings on the street, and so forth) can be done by teacher and students together while watching videotapes or films. After viewing them the teacher and students may compare notes and supplement each other's observations and findings. Useful videotapes and films are now easily accessible, but their potential has not yet been tapped.

4) Encourage students to develop interpersonal contacts with native English speakers. So far, such contacts are far from adequate. At colleges where there are no native speakers of English as teachers, it is helpful to invite English-speaking guests as casual visitors to

the language class. It is in such relaxed, personal contacts that the students are apt to pick up some of the cultural information they would not be able to get otherwise.

5) Assign students to read short stories and plays and require them to write down significant details related to the target culture. Students normally read literature either for the plot or for critical analysis (some poorer ones still pore over a novel for words and idioms at the expense of everything else!), but they seldom pay attention to cultural details. As a matter of fact, novels and drama on contemporary themes contain much interesting and useful cultural information in a context appropriate for study.[8]

6) Include books on intercultural communication in the students' reading list. Books such as **Beyond Language** (Levine and Adelman, 1982) may supplement the students' own understanding of cultural differences. [Several books are recommended by the editor on pages 18 and 19.]

7) Give lectures on the "facts, faces, and fiestas" of other countries and, where possible, compare customs and habits of the Chinese with those of other people.

All these, when done systematically, will contribute to the students' understanding of the cultural traits of other peoples. But to observe and understand the cultural traits of a foreign country is one thing, to become empathetic with its people and culture is quite another.

The difficulties involved in acquiring true empathy are widely recognized. Hall illustrates the difficulty in understanding what he calls "hidden culture" with his own experience in Japan. He concludes, "Two things get in the way of understandings: the linearity of language and the deep biases and built-in blinders that every culture provides. Transcending either is a formidable task."[9] Benedict points out, "We may know all about the distribution of a tribe's form of marriage, ritual dances, and puberty initiations, and yet understand nothing of the culture as a whole which has used these elements to its own purpose."[10]

The difficulties in cross-cultural understanding are even greater for Chinese learners than for learners in some other countries. One of the reasons for this is that most Chinese learners have little chance of mixing with native English speakers, to say nothing of "living the culture." To be able to understand cultural traits and accept them as rational is hard enough. To feel with another people, to get inside the heads of others is, for most, an almost unattainable goal. To approach Level 4, empathy, we recommend the following:

1) Offer courses in history, anthropology, and sociology in which students learn not only some facts about other cultures, but also the basic concepts and principles involved in any culture. Often, concepts and guiding principles are more important than the facts themselves because these provide a framework in which the students may examine their own and other cultures. This may enable students to adopt a more

flexible attitude, to learn to respect differences, and to reduce their cultural bias. Through the study of anthropology, for instance, students can learn to recognize the diversity of cultures and to not look upon anything different as inferior.

2) Encourage students to read extensively -- from fiction to non-fiction, from serious writing to children's books (including nursery rhymes, folk stories, and fairy tales), from literature and arts to philosophy. Through such exposure, students may develop a more mature and more complete understanding of the target culture. Reading fiction is an effective way for students to immerse themselves in another culture. Reading extensively may not yield immediate results, but it does help students understand another culture at a deeper level -- that is, it helps them grasp the values and beliefs of another people. The concept of privacy, for example, is an elusive one to most Chinese students, but in reading fiction they come across numerous examples of privacy and will understand gradually why people from certain other cultures guard it as something inviolable.

3) Where possible, send students overseas to live among native English speakers for a period of time. This is already done at one or two institutions. As time goes on, there may be more such opportunities. There is nothing to replace such exposure. The advantage is so obvious that we need not labor this point here.

Although much has been said about the need to emphasize the socio-cultural aspect of language learning, we should now sound a note of warning. We must not think that all learners of English, no matter what they do, should attach equal importance to the learning and understanding of cultural traits. Those who learn English merely for the sake of reading scientific data and journals in English should not be expected to learn a great deal about Western culture. Those who learn English for the purpose of international communication should not relate their study of English to British or American culture alone. Their perspective needs to be wider. As Smith points out, "More and more countries are making English their **lingua franca** to communicate with the rest of the world -- not just the native English-speaking world . . . . When any language becomes international in character, it cannot be bound to any one culture."[11]

In designing English language courses, we should see to it that the cultural component should include not only "high civilization" but also customs, habits, and the way of life of English-speaking peoples. We should also see to it that the cultural component is not overemphasized in beginning courses and is increased gradually as students progress in their language learning. I agree with what Robinett says: "In the early stages of language learning, students should be encouraged to use the language (appropriately or not) just to establish the fact that they **can** use it. Too much emphasis on appropriateness may result in an oversensitivity to what is considered correct and produce a fear of speaking at all."[12]

NOTES

[1] C. J. Ovando and V. P. Collier. **Bilingual and ESL Classrooms: Teaching in Multicultural Contexts.** (McGraw-Hill, 1985). pp. 103-105.

[2] A catalogue of courses offered at twenty institutions is given in Li Yanfu's essay, "An Analysis of the Twenty Syllabuses for Third and Fourth-Year English Curriculums in Universities and Foreign language Institutes," **Foreign Language Teaching and Research**, No. 1, 1984.

[3] Articles on Western customs and habits have appeared in **English Language Learning** (1981 - 1983) and **The World of English** (1982 - 1983). Essays have been published on culturally loaded words in **Xiandai Waiyu** (Modern Foreign Languages, No. 4, 1980) and on cultural differences in **Foreign Language Teaching and Research** (No. 4, 1982).

[4] The institutions involved were: Xian Institute of Foreign Languages, East China Normal University, Shanghai University of Industrial Technology, Beijing Second Institute of Foreign Languages, and Beijing Foreign Studies University.

[5] M. Sukwiwat. "Crossing the Cultural Threshhold: A Challenge to Users of EIL," in **English for Cross-Cultural Communication.** Larry Smith, editor. (Macmillan, 1982). pp. 220-221.

[6] N. Wolfson. "Rules of Speaking," in **Language and Communication.** J. C. Richards and R. W. Schmidt, editors. (Longman, 1983). p. 62.

[7] R. G. Hanvey. "Cross-Cultural Awareness," in **Toward Internationalism: Readings in Cross-Cultural Communication.** E. C. Smith and L. F. Luce, editors. (Newbury House, 1979). p. 53.

[8] Bouton's use of carefully selected short stories in the culture component of his MATESL curriculum throws light on the possibilities of using literature in this way. L. F. Bouton. "Using Literature in the Culture Component of the MATESL Curriculum." (Unpublished, 1984).

[9] E. T. Hall. **Beyond Culture.** (Anchor Books, 1976). pp. 58-69.

[10] R. Benedict. **Patterns of Culture.** (George Routledge & Sons, 1935). p. 47.

[11] L. E. Smith, editor. **Readings in English as an International Language.** (Pergamon, 1983). p. 7.

[12] B. W. Robinett. **Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: Substance and Technique.** (University of Minnesota Press / McGraw-Hill, 1978). pp. 151-152.

The Editor Recommends . . .

Church, Nancy, and Moss, Anne. **How to Survive in the U.S.A.: English for Travelers and Newcomers.** 1983. This modest-length volume and its associated audiotape cassette are intended for people who already know some English and are planning to visit or live in the United States. The ten units address practical situations faced frequently by almost everyone, such as communicating by phone and mail, getting around by public transportation, handling money, getting something to eat, being a welcome guest, and so forth. Each unit provides examples of the types of documents that one is likely to encounter in the U.S. (including sample advertisements), a section of helpful practical hints for the newcomer, a comparison of terms in American and British English, and an extensive glossary. The audiotape replicates typical conversations with service personnel (waiters, taxi drivers, ticket clerks, and so forth) and officials; full transcripts of these conversations are printed in the book. The book could be used without the audiotape; no teacher is necessary in any case. Cambridge University Press: (a) The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, England; (b) 32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA; (c) 296 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park, Melbourne 3206, Australia.

Coffey, Margaret Pogemiller. **Fitting In: A Functional/Notional Text for Learners of English.** 1983. This remarkable text- and workbook is focused on 23 particular functions of English including introductions, greetings, goodbyes, apologies, compliments, requests, interruptions, commands, expressing opinions, and changing conversational topics. Each chapter includes ten learning approaches ranging from straightforward explanations of the function in the context of U.S. culture through role plays, dialogues, and problem-solving activities. Each chapter also includes information about the non-verbal behavior that typically accompanies the function. Especially noteworthy is Coffey's attention, throughout this text, to the subtle social factors that must be taken into account in any situation in order for the function in question to be properly carried out. Ways of discharging each function, ranging from highly formal to highly informal, are set forth as alternatives, and practice is provided in determining which one applies. A great deal of painstaking analysis of U.S. cultural patterns went into the writing of this text, which is intended for intermediate students of English learning together in a classroom situation. Prentice-Hall, U.S. Highway 9, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632.

Grove, Cornelius Lee. **A Fondness for Ice Water: A Brief Introduction to the U.S.A. and Its People.** 1984. This 18-page introductory essay was written primarily for older adolescents and younger adults who are entering the United States for the first time. Emphasis is placed on explaining the day-to-day features of the educational system, family

life, and the social life of youth. Also treated are the geography, people, government, economy, and religion of the U.S. as well as typical American characteristics (individualism, equality, friendliness, assertiveness, and hard work) and non-verbal behaviors. The title is taken from Mark Twain's comment that "The only distinguishing characteristic of the American character I've been able to discover is a fondness for ice water," which sets the theme for the entire essay: In spite of many cultural similarities, there is remarkable diversity in the U.S. Users will need a good working knowledge of English. No mention of AFS is made in the text. Research Department, AFS International, 313 East 43rd Street, New York, NY 10017.

Kearny, Edward N.; Kearny, Mary Ann; and Crandall, Jo Ann. **The American Way: An Introduction to American Culture.** 1984. The authors have prepared this 240-page volume primarily for classroom use with "high intermediate to advanced ESL students who plan to attend academic institutions in the United States." The dual purpose of the book is to strengthen the study skills of the students while providing basic information about U.S. values and how these affect religion, business, government, race relations, education, recreation, and the family in the United States. Many photographs are included, as are charts and graphs illustrating the findings of public opinion polls by the Roper and Gallup organizations. This volume includes excellent material on life in the U.S. and could be used in classes studying U.S. culture or cross-cultural communication; however, some features intended particularly for ESL students could be somewhat distracting. Prentice-Hall, U.S. Highway 9, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632.

Lanier, Alison R. **Living in the U.S.A.** 1981. The author, who for many years was professionally involved in training newcomers to the U.S., offers information about the customs, manners, ideas, values, and ways of life of the American people, plus practical advice concerning money, housing, schools, health care, transportation, and much more. This 200-page book is intended for adults, and requires a good working knowledge of English. Intercultural Press, P.O. Box 768, Yarmouth, ME 04096.

Levine, Deena R., and Adelman, Mara B. **Beyond Language: Intercultural Communication for English as a Second Language.** 1982. This textbook is designed for use with advanced students of English as a Second (or Foreign) Language. As the title suggests, the authors have attempted to go beyond attention to the mechanics of English to address the more subtle cultural values and communication patterns prevalent in the U.S. Among the chapter titles are "Nonverbal Communication," "Personal Relationships," "Educational Attitudes," "Work Values," and "Time and Space Patterns." Each chapter includes a number of exercises for improving English skills. Prentice-Hall, U.S. Highway 9, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632.

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